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SUBJECT: SAUDI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETS WITH THE  
AMABASSADOR

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. During his first meeting with Ambassador Fraker, Human Rights Commission (HRC) Chairman Turki Al-Sudairy emphasized that the creation of the HRC only 18 months ago was a huge step forward for the Kingdom. Al-Sudairy hoped that the USG would become less critical and more supportive of the HRC. Al-Sudairy explained that the primary focus of the HRC was increasing awareness of human rights issues in the Kingdom. He noted that unlike pre-revolutionary Iran, Saudi Arabia intended to promote change at a sustainable pace. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) For the first time since its inception, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) Chairman Turki Al-Sudairy, accompanied by staff, met with Ambassador Fraker on January 123. Al-Sudairy began the discussion by emphasizing the importance of understanding between Saudi and American culture. He also noted the importance of developing the already strong relationship between the SAG and the USG. According to Al-Sudairy, most nations know a lot about the US, but the US does not pay sufficient attention to or show enough concern about the Middle East or Muslims. Al-Sudairy expressed his appreciation that the Ambassador understands the country, culture, and the importance of a two-way dialogue instead of a one-way monologue.

¶3. (U) In response to Al-Sudairy's concern, Ambassador Fraker emphasized that the USG and the SAG are reinforcing ties, and that Americans and Saudis are also re-establishing ties. He stressed the importance of exchanges and visits in order for Americans to better understand Saudis and the KSA, and so that Saudis can better understand Americans and the US. He pointed out that recently there was an exchange program sponsored by the US that included 75 women and men.

¶4. (U) Al-Sudairy explained the priorities of the HRC, stating its primary purpose is to monitor human rights violations committed by the SAG. He stated that the HRC tries to ensure that human rights laws and their application are consistent with Sharia. He stressed that Islam already emphasizes human rights, so the subject is not new to the KSA; though Saudis need to be educated on this matter. Al-Sudairy also mentioned recent changes in laws in the KSA. For example, Saudi women can now stay at hotels unaccompanied. As for driving, Al-Sudairy believes women will be driving in the near future, but said he was unable to provide any more information. When Ambassador Fraker mentioned that some women do not want to drive; Al-Sudairy replied that there are others who cannot afford a driver. He added that over 200,000 work permits are issued annually for drivers. So, if women could drive, there would not be a need for them to have drivers.

15. (U) Currently, most of the HRC Board members are males. However, the HRC is looking for a separate building to lease so that the female employees and advisors can work fulltime in a women,s section. Al-Sudairy explained that the HRC currently has a branch office in the Eastern Province and a branch office in the western part of the KSA. Eventually, the HRC will open other branch offices. He informed that the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) deals with complaints against individuals and groups of individuals, to which the HRC and NSHR cooperate and communicate.

6.(U) When Ambassador Fraker asked what the USG can do to help the HRC, Al-Sudairy replied that the USG can be less critical towards the HRC and the NSHR. He asserted that the HRC is doing what it is supposed to do, not just trying. He continued that Saudi Arabia is slowly developing socially. Therefore, the HRC needs encouragement from the USG, not criticism. Al-Sudairy commented that the USG does not understand that Saudi Arabia is a new country barely 75 years old, with 60 percent of the cities in the Kingdom less than 25 years old. He noted that when the U.S. was 75 years old there was still slavery and women could not vote. He cautioned the USG in rushing the SAG to develop too much or there could be a situation similar to the situation with the Shah of Iran. Finally, he mentioned that exchanges of Americans and Saudis should be increased. Al-Sudairy believes the HRC also needs training on raising public awareness and the HRC would appreciate any help from USG and US NGOs.

17. (C) COMMENT. Although discussions with the HRC have always been open and friendly, it is clear that this organization is still struggling to address human rights violations within the Kingdom. Training for the HRC is

crucial at this point, to which Post will discuss opportunities for training with NGOs in the region. Post believes it will be some time before the HRC can effectively work with SAG ministries to systematically address human rights issues until proper training is received. END COMMENT.  
GFOELLER